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The Year Ahead

PUBLIC RELATIONS JOURNAL

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COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

It's time to move beyond awareness to innovative use of the new tools

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The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is an individual-membership professional society of 11,800 public relations practitioners. Its major services to members include programs of Professional Development and Accreditation, an Information Center, publications, tracking of issues of national concern, and promotion of ethical practice through adherence to PRSA's "Code of Professional Standards." PRSA's mission is, "To serve the public need for understanding and cooperation among its diverse interests by fostering high professional and ethical standards for all those practicing public relations."

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Study shows that public information campaigns work

Do information campaigns really "work"? A recent study says they do, and reveals some interesting facts about the people influenced most and the ways in which effects of campaigns are evidenced. The findings of the study, "Take a Bite Out of Crime: The Impact of a Public Information Campaign," were presented last August at the convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC).

The public service campaign studied, under a U.S. Department of Justice grant, was the Advertising Council's "Take a Bite Out of Crime." Research included a national sample survey of 1,200 adults, conducted by the Roper Organization, and a panel survey with a probability sample of 1,049 adults in Denver, Milwaukee and Buffalo.

The purpose of the Ad Council's campaign was to promote citizen competence in crime prevention, through fostering: public awareness of prevention methods; positive attitudes about effectiveness of citizen activities; confidence in ability to take action to stop victimization; concern for protecting self and others; and actions to reduce crime.

The national sample analysis found that 52 percent of respondents recalled having seen the campaign's public service announcements (PSAs), primarily on television; and 33 percent encountered the PSAs more than 10 times. Among panel survey members, 48 percent reported exposure to the campaign messages.

At the AEJMC convention, Garrett J. O'Keefe, professor of mass communication at the University of Denver, reported that according to the study those exposed to the campaign showed significant gains toward meeting three of the Ad Council's crime prevention objectives: awareness; positive attitudes; and feelings of personal competence in protecting self from crime.

The campaign appeared to have no effect, however, on creating feelings of personal responsibility for helping prevent crime, or on increasing personal involvement regarding crime prevention. According to Mr. O'Keefe, "These findings held even when controlling for possible intervening variables [such as] encounters with other crime prevention campaigns, exposure to crime-related mass media content, direct encounters with crime, or having been victimized." Noting that "The most stringent test of an information campaign's effectiveness is whether changes in people's actions or behavior can be traced to their exposure to the campaign," he reported significant changes in six of the seven prevention activities specifically recommended in the PSAs.

The table reflects changes in crime prevention activities promoted by the campaign. The "Time 1" column indicates percentage of respondents in pre-campaign interviews who consistently took indicated actions. "Time 2" columns show net-change percentages for frequency of activity among those exposed and unexposed to the campaign.

Some other findings regarding the effects of the campaign:

- Increases in prevention activities consistently were greater among individuals with *lower* initial levels of awareness and prevention knowledge and confidence.
- Neighborhood observing showed sharpest increases among those with a greater awareness of rising neighborhood crime and vulnerability.
- Neighborhood-organizing efforts increased significantly among those who saw themselves as likely victims of burglary or assault.
- Police reporting rose only among those who felt threatened to a lesser degree (although reporting initially

PSA IMPACT ON CRIME PREVENTION ACTIVITIES

Activity	Time 1	Time 2	
	Percent Taking Action Consistently	Percent Net Change: Exposed Group	Percent Net Change: Unexposed Group
Leave outdoor lights on	41	+29	+ 9
Use timer on indoor lights	30	+18	-13
Have neighbors watch house	62	+26	+11
Keep watch on neighborhood	82	+ 4	- 1
Report suspicions to police	33	+ 5	- 5
Join others to prevent crime	13	+10	+ 1
Have a dog for security	42	+19	+11

was more frequent among those who felt threatened to a great degree, suggesting a ceiling effect).

Regarding opinion leaders, Mr. O'Keefe stated that, "As expected, crime prevention opinion leaders prior to the campaign correlated positively and significantly with prevention knowledge and confidence, police reporting, neighborhood observing, and [memberships in] organizations. However, opinion leaders . . . exposed to the campaign significantly increased their confidence in citizen prevention measures, including outdoor lighting and joining organizations. . . . Opinion followers showed substantial gains in levels of knowledge and confidence, as well as in police reporting, joining and neighborhood observing. These data further support a view that opinion leaders are not as necessary to information and influence dissemination as they may have been several decades ago. In this instance, opinion followers appear to be undergoing changes as a direct consequence of exposure to the campaign . . . [and] it seems clear that campaign exposure was at minimum a major agent of change."

Mr. O'Keefe concluded, "Taken at face value, these findings go far in refuting many of the hypotheses and assumptions concerning campaign efficacy posed [by limited-effects theory] in earlier decades. And they tend to support more recently suggested views of the media [as] having potential for more substantial persuasive effects."

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Burrelle's Clipping Service scores scoop; gains AP wires

Livingston, N.J. (Nov. 7) — Beginning today, Burrelle's Press Clipping Service has filled the single gap in its coverage by initiating the monitoring of the A and F wires of the Associated Press.

The event marks the first time that the AP has granted such access to a clipping bureau, and makes Burrelle's the only company in its field to monitor all four wire services. The three others are Dow Jones, Reuters and UPI.

"Our customers in public relations have long waited for this coverage," a Burrelle's spokesman said. "Press release pick-up by the AP — the most comprehensive and prestigious wire service — means major national and international exposure. PR professionals need to know immediately when their clients are making that kind of news. We're proud that Burrelle's can now accommodate them."

The Associated Press A wire reports the world's most important news 24 hours daily. The F wire concentrates on financial and economic news, such as major corporate appointments, acquisitions, plant expansions, quarterly earnings reports, and federal regulatory rulings.

For Burrelle's, addition of the AP wires means virtually total coverage of all the media. Burrelle's readers scrutinize nearly 17,000 publications, far more than any other clipping service. In addition, only Burrelle's monitors all network TV and radio news and public affairs programs as well as local news broadcasts in major cities.

Burrelle's also boasts a unique computerized editing department, which saves clients time and money by weeding out unwanted items. By the same token, the bureau puts its employees on special alert when a customer requests meticulous tracking of a specific release or news event.

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